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UK Shadow Minister calls for settlement goods ban if Israel annexes West Bank lands
Lisa Nandy called on the British government for 'concrete action' in response to Israel's annexation drive, calling the situation 'urgent' saying the move would require courage that ministers have not shown so far
i24NEWS| Published: 06.28.20 , 21:34

UK Shadow Foreign Secretary Lisa Nandy has called for a ban on settlements goods if Israel goes through with extending its sovereignty over territories in the West Bank.

The former Labor Party leadership candidate called on the government for "concrete action" in response to Israel's annexation drive, calling the situation "urgent."

"The government must be clear with the Israeli coalition government [so that it know] that concrete action will follow, including a ban on products entering Britain from illegal locations in the West Bank," she added.

Nandy said in an interview in the Observer, that the move would be a "major step" and require "courage that so far ministers have not been willing to show."

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is free to pursue his party's annexation goals starting July 1, according to a coalition agreement signed by the country's two biggest parties in March.

"The proposal to unilaterally annex nearly a third of the West Bank is an illegal act, which would undermine the prospect of a peaceful two-state solution for Israel and Palestine and would have serious consequences for the stability of the Middle East," Nandy reiterated.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said in Parliament earlier this month that the UK government "strongly objected" to the plan and restated support for the two-state solution.

Earlier this week, Belgian lawmakers overwhelmingly approved a non-binding resolution calling for Brussels to apply economic sanctions against Israel if it goes through with its annexation plans while urging all member-states of the European Union to do the same.

06.27.20

IDF strikes local Gaza Jihad fighter targets after 2 rockets fired at Israel

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IDF strikes Gaza targets after rockets fired at Israel

No injuries or damage to property reported in attack that sends local residents scrambling to shelters; Palestinian sources say Islamic Jihad cell in Strip was behind attack, apparently without knowledge of group's leadership
Elior Levy, i24NEWS | Updated: 06.27.20 , 00:03

Israeli warplanes struck targets in the Gaza Strip on Friday night, shortly after two rockets were fired at Israeli territory from the coastal enclave.

The rocket fire set off air raid sirens in communities in southern Israel, sending local residents to their bomb shelters.

No injuries or damage to property were reported.

Palestinian sources told Ynet that members of the Islamic Jihad terror group were behind the rocket fire, although it appears to have been the initiative of local fighters and not the group's leadership.

Israel has reportedly deployed its Iron Dome missile defense system to the city of Sderot, located close to the Gaza border.

The strikes came a day after the Hamas terrorist organization, which rules the Gaza Strip, warned Israel that if it follows through with its plan to annex areas of the West Bank it would be seen as "a declaration of war."

"This wretched decision and plan, we'll not discuss at length, but will say concisely and clearly – the resistance considers the decision as a declaration of war on the Palestinian

people," said Abu Ubaida, the spokesman of the Izz a-Din al-Qassam Brigades, the armed wing of the Hamas movement.

"The resistance is ready to protect its people and its holy places," he said.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said the plan to annex West Bank settlements and Jordan Valley would begin July 1, in accordance with his Likud party's coalition agreement with Defense Minister Benny Gantz's Blue & White.

According to the Israeli media, however, Israel has informed the Palestinian Authority that the plan to claim sovereignty over areas of the territory would not extend to the Jordan Valley and would instead apply only to several as yet unspecified settlement blocs.

06.26.20

South Africa Israelis, annex raises specter of apartheid, living under different laws

06.26.20

For some Israelis, annexation raises specter of apartheid

In-depth: Supporters of the government find the term deeply offensive, but former South African activist warns West Bank move could create a modern-day version of the system, with settlers and Palestinians living under different laws

Associated Press| Published: 06.26.20 , 18:53

Benjamin Pogrund spent decades battling apartheid as a journalist in South Africa. Since moving to Israel two decades ago, he has passionately defended the country against charges that it too is an apartheid state.

But at the age of 87, Pogrund is having second thoughts. He says that if Israel moves ahead with plans to annex parts of the West Bank, he will have no choice but to declare that his adopted homeland has become a modern-day version of apartheid-era South Africa.

"There will be Israeli overlords in an occupied area. And the people over whom they will be ruling will not have basic rights," Pogrund said in an interview in his leafy backyard garden. "That will be apartheid. And we will merit the charge. And that is something that worries me gravely because it exposes us to huge dangers."

Pogrund, a prolific author who is working on a new book about South African political history, says he feels so despondent he's been unable to write about looming annexation. "I couldn't bring myself to do it. Quite frankly, I just feel so bleak about it, that it is so stupid and ill-advised and arrogant," he said.

For years, Israel's harshest detractors have labeled it an apartheid state to describe its rule over Palestinians who were denied basic rights in occupied areas. For the most part, Israel has successfully pushed back against the fraught word.

But as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu nears launching his annexation moves as part of President Donald Trump's Mideast plan — perhaps as early as next month — the term is increasingly becoming part of Israel's political conversation.

Mainstream politicians who oppose annexation have begun to use the term. Disillusioned former military men bounce it around.

Israel's most popular political satire show, "Wonderful Country," recently ran a spoof ad for a fictitious drone company that lifts Palestinians and flies them away from annexed land. The drone's name: "Apart-High."

"When you start doing these unilateral actions, you actually put yourself on a very slippery slope," said Gadi Shamni, a retired Israeli general who once commanded the West Bank.

Inevitably, Palestinians in annexed areas will demand the rights of citizens, including the right to vote, which will "eventually create some kind of apartheid," he warned.

Apartheid refers to the system of racial discrimination enforced by South Africa's white-minority regime from 1948 until 1994. It was characterized by separate housing and public facilities for blacks and whites, bans on interracial relations and disenfranchisement of the Black majority.

Branded a pariah state, South Africa peacefully dismantled apartheid in 1994, when democratic elections brought Nelson Mandela to become its first Black president.

Supporters of the Israeli government are outraged at comparisons to South Africa. They note that Israel's Arab minority, about 20% of the population, can vote and, even if there is some discrimination, have risen high in business, politics and entertainment.

They say the West Bank is "disputed," not occupied, and defend Israel's presence in the West Bank in terms of security or the deep Jewish connection to what religious Jews call biblical Judea and Samaria.

The comparison is "deeply offensive," said Eugene Kontorovich, head of the international law department at the Kohelet Policy Forum, a conservative think tank in Jerusalem that frequently advises Netanyahu's government.

"Apartheid was a system in which a minority white government in South Africa ruled over the Black majority," he said. "They taxed them. They drafted them, and they passed every law under which they lived."

He said none of these conditions apply, with most Palestinians governed by the self-rule Palestinian Authority, which has limited autonomy in parts of the West Bank.

Pogrand sees things differently, the result of his years of experience in South Africa.

As a reporter and editor at the Rand Daily Mail in Johannesburg, Pogrand documented many of the horrors of apartheid.

These included the infamous Sharpeville massacre in which South African police fired on black protesters, killing 69 people, and exposés about prison conditions and the torture of Black prison inmates.

He was jailed for refusing to identify an informant, put on trial for his reporting, saw his home ransacked by police and sometimes required a bodyguard. He visited Mandela, a trusted source and friend, in prison. Last year, he received a "National Order," one of South Africa's most prestigious awards.

Pogrund left South Africa after his newspaper was closed in 1985 under government pressure. After time in London and the United States, he moved to Israel in 1997. Pogrund is a vocal critic of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians. He describes the West Bank occupation — in which Israeli settlers and Palestinians live under different sets of laws — with words like “tyrannical,” “oppression” and “brutality.” But he has always stopped short of calling it apartheid, believing the term is uniquely evil.

“It’s a deadly word,” he said.

Advocates of the term argue that it already is applicable in the West Bank because, despite the existence of the Palestinian Authority, Israel has ultimate, de facto control over the territory. It controls entry and exit, water and other resources and overall security. Under interim peace accords, it also maintains full control over 60% of the West Bank where all settlements are located and tens of thousands of Palestinians live but have no voice.

As appalling as he finds the occupation, Pogrund has argued for years in articles, lectures and a 2014 book that the situation lacks the “intentionality” and “institutionalized” racism of South Africa.

Where South Africa’s system was designed with the intent of creating second-class people based on their skin color, he believes Israel’s poor treatment of Palestinians are rooted in security concerns.

“There’s discrimination. There’s oppression. It’s not apartheid,” he said.

Pogrund said he began to have misgivings several years ago when the Israeli parliament passed its “Nation-State Law,” which declared the country to be the “national home” of the Jewish people while appearing to downgrade the status of the Arab minority.

“Annexation will take us right over the edge,” he said.

In a recent interview, Netanyahu said Palestinians would remain in “enclaves” and “remain Palestinian subjects.”

Some reports have suggested that Netanyahu may scale back the annexation to help minimize international criticism, but Pogrund says size doesn’t matter.

During his time in London, he recalled a shopper picking up a package of grapes, seeing they were a product of South Africa and putting them down in disgust. He fears Israel will be in a similar position.

“You’ll be carrying the apartheid stigma,” he said. “We are heading straight into self-inflicting [this] on ourselves. We are applying apartheid, the hated word of the second half of the 20th century.”

06.28.20

Lebanon FM summons US ambassador to Beirut over Hezbollah comments

06.28.20

Report: Lebanon's FM to summon U.S. envoy over Hezbollah comments

Local media says minister to meet with ambassador after judge banned local, foreign media outlets from interviewing Shea, saying her criticism of Hezbollah was seditious and a threat to social peace

Associated Press| Published: 06.28.20 , 16:32

Lebanon's foreign minister summoned the U.S. ambassador to Beirut over comments she made recently in which she criticized the militant Hezbollah group, state-run National News Agency reported Sunday.

The agency gave no further details other than saying that the meeting between Foreign Minister Nassif Hitti and Ambassador Dorothy Shea is scheduled for Monday afternoon.

Local media said the minister will tell the ambassador that according to the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, an ambassador has no right to interfere in the internal affairs of another country and should not incite the Lebanese people against one another. On Saturday, a Lebanese judge banned local and foreign media outlets in the country from interviewing the U.S. ambassador for a year saying that her criticism of Hezbollah was seditious and a threat to social peace.

The judge's ruling came a day after Shea told Saudi-owned TV station Al-Hadath that Washington has "great concerns" over Hezbollah's role in the government.

The move was harshly criticized by many in Lebanon, which enjoyed one of the freer media landscapes in the Arab world. Others, however, criticized Shea for comments deemed interference in Lebanon's internal affairs

Lebanon's President Michel Aoun meets with U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon Dorothy

Since the ban by the judge was imposed on Saturday, several local TV stations aired fresh comments from Shea in which she described the judge's decision as "unfortunate." She added that a senior Lebanese government official, whom she did not name, apologized to her.

"I was contacted yesterday afternoon by a very high-ranking and a well-placed official in the Lebanese government and this official expressed apologies, conveyed that this ruling did not have proper standing," Shea told the local MTV station on Sunday. Shea added that the official told her that the government "will take the necessary step to reverse it." The court decision reflected the rising tension between the U.S. and Hezbollah. It also revealed a widening rift among groups in Lebanon, which is facing the worst economic crisis in its modern history.

Hezbollah legislator Hassan Fadlallah on Sunday called Shea's comments "flagrant aggression on the sovereignty of our country and its national dignity." He called on the foreign ministry to force the ambassador to "respect international law."

Lebanon is gripped by a deepening financial crisis and talks with the International Monetary Fund for assistance have been complicated by political infighting. Shea said Lebanon is reeling from years of corruption of successive governments and accused Hezbollah of siphoning off government funds for its own purposes and of obstructing needed economic reforms.

Hezbollah, the Iran-backed Shi'ite group, and its allies are dominant in parliament and back the current government. It is designated by Washington as a terrorist group and the U.S. has continued to expand sanctions against the organization.

However, Washington is one of the largest donors to the Lebanese army, making for one of the more complicated diplomatic balancing acts in the region.

06.25.20

US to reimpose UN Iran sanctions to supply, sell or transfer arms or related material

06.25.20

U.S. says if no arms embargo on Iran it will seek UN sanctions

Pompeo speaks ahead of briefing to Security Council members, warns Iran will be able to purchase advanced weapons systems, become global arms dealer of choice for terrorists and rogue regimes

Associated Press| Published: 06.25.20 , 10:35

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Wednesday threatened to seek to reimpose U.N. sanctions on Iran if the UN Security Council does not approve a resolution that would indefinitely extend the arms embargo on Tehran, which is set to expire in October.

Pompeo told a news conference at the State Department in Washington that without extending the arms embargo, "Iran will be able to purchase advanced weapons systems and become an arms dealer of choice for terrorists and rogue regimes all throughout the world. This is unacceptable."

He spoke ahead of a closed video briefing to Security Council members Wednesday afternoon on the U.S. draft resolution to maintain the arms embargo by U.S. Special Representative for Iran Brian Hook and U.S. Ambassador Kelly Craft.

Tensions between Iran and the U.S. have escalated since the Trump administration withdrew from the 2015 nuclear deal between Tehran and six major powers in 2018 and reimposed crippling U.S. sanctions.

A year ago, the U.S. sent thousands of additional troops, long-range bombers, and an aircraft carrier to the Middle East in response to what it called a growing threat of Iranian attacks on U.S. interests in the region.

The five other powers that signed the nuclear deal - Russia, China, UK, France, and Germany - remain committed to it, saying the agreement is key to continuing inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and preventing Iran from pursuing nuclear weapons.

Lifting the arms embargo is part of the 2015 Security Council resolution endorsing the nuclear agreement. The Security Council is scheduled to discuss the resolution's implementation on June 30.

Calling Iran "the leading state sponsor of terror," Pompeo said the U.S. focus is to work with the Security Council to pass the resolution.

"But, in the event that doesn't happen, I would remind the world that the Obama administration's officials said very clearly that the United States has the unilateral ability to snap back sanctions into place," he said.

The 2015 nuclear deal includes a "snap back" provision which would restore all UN sanctions against Iran that had been lifted or eased if the nuclear deal is violated.

The State Department said that in his briefing, Hook pointed to Iranian arms transfers and "the full range of Iran's malign activity, including its September 2019 direct attack on Saudi Arabia," which violate current restrictions. Drone strikes hit two Saudi oil installations on Sept. 14, which the U.S. blamed on Iran.

Russia's UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia has made clear Moscow's opposition to a new arms embargo on Iran and has dismissed as "ridiculous" the possibility of the Trump administration trying to use the "snap back" provision.

Nebenzia said the U.S. pulled out of the agreement and "they have no right" to use any of its provisions.

But Pompeo and Craft insist the resolution makes clear the U.S. retains the right to use the "snap back" provision.

Diplomats said that at Wednesday's closed briefing there was an exchange of views with the U.S. on one side and Russia on the other.

Some Western governments privately fear that maintaining an arms embargo will lead Iran to oust IAEA inspectors and move ahead on developing nuclear weapons.

The latest report by IAEA said Iran has continued to increase its stockpiles of low-enriched uranium in violation of the 2015 nuclear deal.

The nuclear agreement promised Iran economic incentives in return for curbs on its nuclear program, which Tehran said it hasn't received, especially since the U.S. withdrawal in 2018. Iran has since slowly and openly violated the nuclear restrictions to try and pressure the remaining nations in the agreement to increase incentives to offset the economy-crippling U.S. sanctions.

The draft U.S. resolution, obtained by The Associated Press, would ban Iran from supplying, selling or transferring any arms or related material from its territory after the embargo expires on Oct. 18.

It would also ban the other 192 UN member states from buying Iranian weapons or allowing their nationals to train, provide financial resources or assistance related "to the supply, sale, transfer, manufacture, maintenance, or use of arms and related materiel" to Iran unless they get Security Council approval at least 30 days in advance.

The draft would authorize all UN member states to inspect cargo entering or transiting through their territory at airports, seaports, and free trade zones from Iran or heading there if the member state "has reasonable grounds to believe the cargo" contains banned items.

It would also condemn the September 2019 attack against Saudi Arabia "carried out by Iran" and condemn December 2019 attacks against an Iraqi military base in Kirkuk and

the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. And it would deplore "Iran's transfers of arms to militias and other armed groups in the region" and demand that Iran stops such transfers immediately.